BRAVEHEARTS

LACHIT BARPHUKAN

King Jayadhwaja Singh of Assam was worried. The Mughal general Mir Jumla had successfully attacked one of his forts. The king's only hope was Lachit, his brave brother-in-law who was also the commander of his army. Though the strain of keeping his country together killed Jayadhwaja, Lachit Barphukan led a brilliant and brave campaign against the Mughals and saved the honour of his king and his country. Lachit's story is chronicled in Assamese texts called *Buranjis*.

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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

LACHIT BARPHUKAN

LEGENDARY COMMANDER OF ASSAM

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LACHIT BARPHUKAN

THE YEAR WAS 1663. A JUBILANT LACHIT AT THE HEAD OF HIS VICTORIOUS ARMY, ENTERED GARGAON, THE CAPITAL OF THEIR HOME-STATE, ASSAM. BUT —

WHY AREN'T THEY CHEERING? WHY DO THEY LOOK SO GLUM? HAVEN'T THEY HEARD OF OUR EXPLOITS AT NARA?*

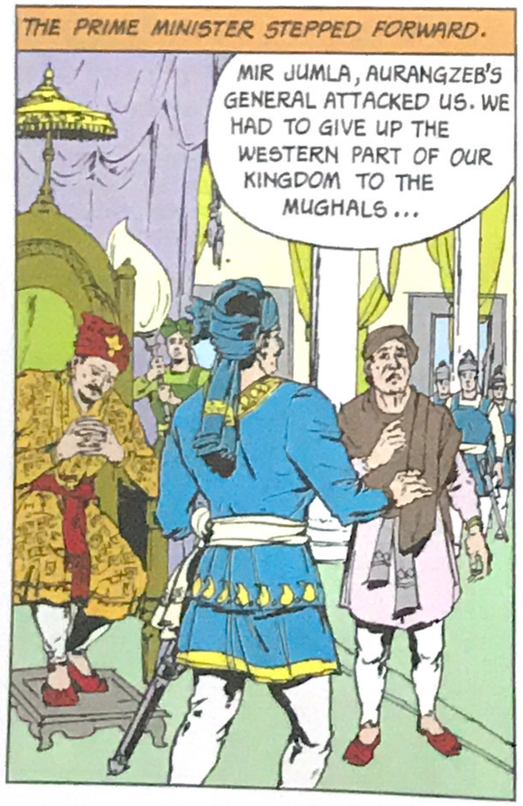
LACHIT CALLED ON HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, KING JAYADHWAJA SINGHA.

YOUR MAJESTY, THE RULER OF NARA IS NOW YOUR VASSAL. WE'VE COLLECTED TRIBUTES FROM HIM. AND YET THE CITY IS GLUM.

* A KINGDOM TO THE EAST OF GARGAON

LACHIT, YOU WON NARA BUT WE LOST SARAIGHAT*.

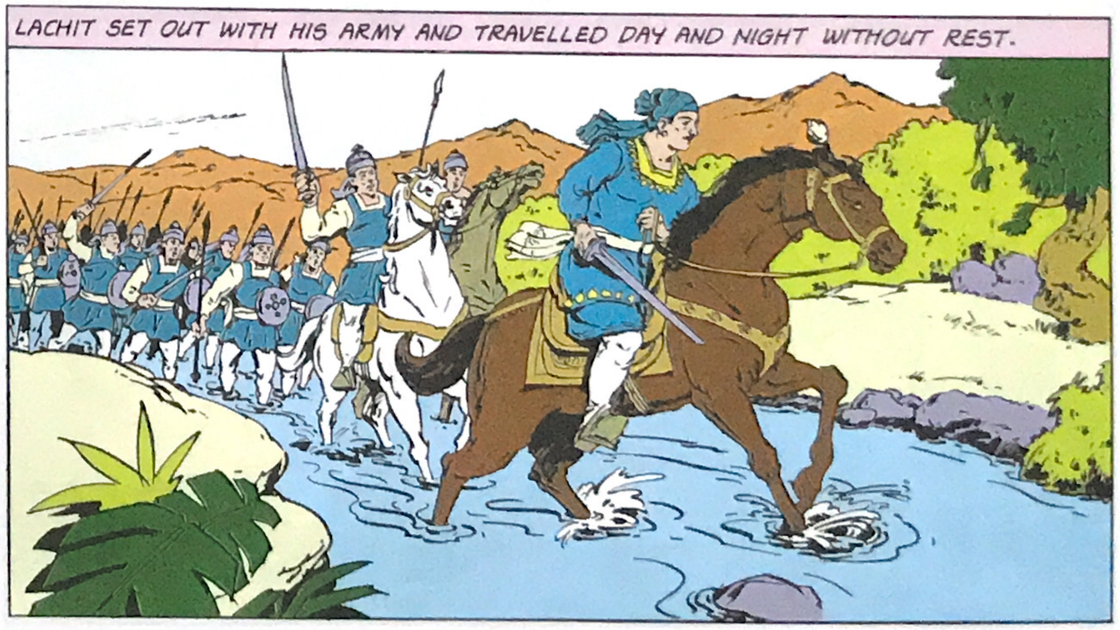
YOUR MAJESTY, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! HOW DID IT HAPPEN?


THE PRIME MINISTER STEPPED FORWARD.
MIR JUMLA, AURANGZEB'S GENERAL ATTACKED US. WE HAD TO GIVE UP THE WESTERN PART OF OUR KINGDOM TO THE MUGHALS...

...AND YOUR NIECE TO THEIR HAREM.

YOUR MAJESTY, HOW COULD YOU? THE HAPPINESS OF YOUR DAUGHTER...!
I KNOW. BUT THE LIVES OF MY SUBJECTS ARE DEARER TO ME, LACHIT.

IF ONLY YOU HAD BEEN HERE!
WELL I'M HERE, NOW. AND ALL IS NOT LOST. MIR JUMLA NO DOUBT HAS HAD A HEAD START. BUT I'LL CATCH UP; AND BRING THE PRINCESS BACK.


LACHIT SET OUT WITH HIS ARMY AND TRAVELLED DAY AND NIGHT WITHOUT REST.

WHEN HE REACHED THE OUTPOST AT KALIABAR —

THE PRINCESS WAS IN THE ADVANCE PARTY. BY NOW IT MUST HAVE REACHED DACCA*.

THEN I AM LATE. BUT I'LL STILL GET MIR JUMLA.

YOU CANNOT, SIR. HE'S DEAD. HIS MEN ARE CARRYING HIS BODY HOME.

THE PRINCESS IS GONE AND MIR JUMLA IS DEAD. I AM LEFT WITH ONLY THE HUMILIATION.

AS LACHIT SAW THE MUGHAL ARMY WENDING ITS WAY HOME —

MY LAND UNDER MUGHAL HEELS! OH, THE SHAME OF IT! BUT ONE DAY, I'LL HAVE MY REVENGE.

LACHIT RETURNED TO THE CAPITAL.

JAYADHWAJA SINGHA TRIED TO PIECE TOGETHER HIS SHATTERED STATE. BUT THE STRAIN TOOK HIM TO HIS DEATHBED. HE TURNED TO CHAKRADHWAJA, HIS HEIR-APPARENT.

MY ONLY REGRET IS THAT THE MUGHALS STILL DICTATE TERMS TO US. MAY YOU SUCCEED IN GETTING RID OF THEM!

WE PROMISE TO WIPE OUT THE STAIN ON THE HONOUR OF OUR LAND, YOUR MAJESTY.

NOW I MAY DIE IN PEACE.

ONE DAY, AFTER CHAKRADHWAJA SINGHA ASCENDED THE THRONE, A MUGHAL ENVOY CALLED ON HIM.

THE EMPEROR IS PLEASED TO PRESENT THE KHELAT* TO HIS VASSAL. HE WANTS YOU TO DON THIS IN OUR PRESENCE.

HOLD YOUR TONGUE!

* ROBE OF HONOUR

THIS IMPUDENCE COULD COST YOU YOUR HEAD!
YOUR MAJESTY...

BUT SINCE YOU ARE A MERE MESSENGER, YOUR LIFE SHALL BE SPARED.

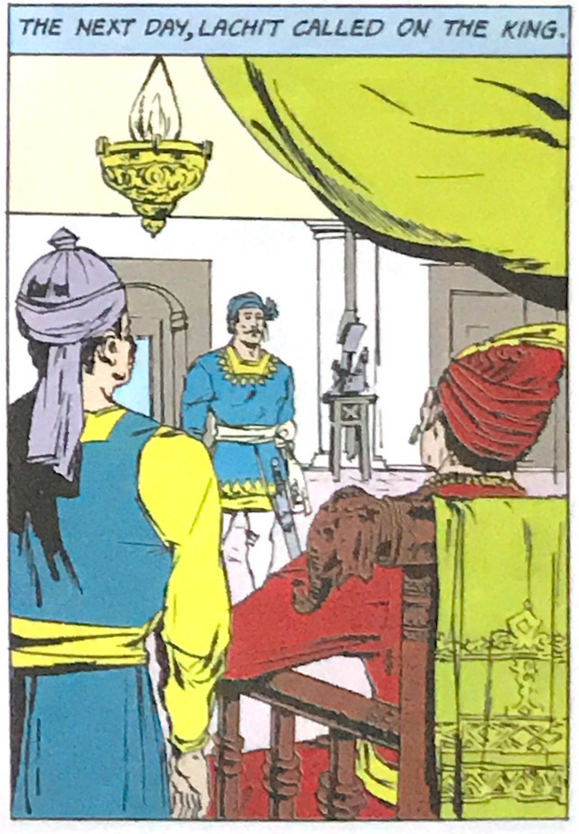
NOW GO BACK WITH THIS MESSAGE: WE ARE NOT VASSALS OF THE MUGHAL EMPEROR.

AFTER THE ENVOY HAD LEFT —
YOUR MAJESTY, NO MORE TIME SHOULD BE LOST. WE MUST DRIVE THE MUGHALS OUT OF WESTERN ASSAM.

ATAN BUREGOHAIN, THE PRIME MINISTER INTERVENED.
YES, YOUR MAJESTY. BUT OUR PREPARATIONS SHOULD BE THOROUGH ENOUGH TO ENSURE A DECISIVE VICTORY.

AS THEY WERE GETTING READY FOR THE FINAL BATTLE —
WE NEED A GENERAL WHOSE LEADERSHIP WILL COMMAND LOYALTY AND INSPIRE CONFIDENCE.

LACHIT WILL BE THE IDEAL CHOICE, YOUR MAJESTY.
ASK HIM TO SEE ME TOMORROW.


THE NEXT DAY, LACHIT CALLED ON THE KING.

AS LACHIT KNELT BEFORE THE KING IN SALUTATION —

YOUR MAJESTY, PROTECT ME.

PRETENDING TO BE ANGRY, THE KING GOT UP.

HOW DARE YOU DRAW YOUR SWORD IN OUR PRESENCE?

YOU SAW WHAT HE DID. NO WARRIOR WORTH HIS NAME WILL BROOK THIS INSULT. IT WAS A MATTER OF HONOUR, YOUR MAJESTY.

THE GUARD WAS CARRYING OUT MY INSTRUCTIONS. I WANTED TO TEST YOU AND YOU HAVE PROVED YOUR WORTH.

THEN THE KING HIMSELF PLACED THE TURBAN ON LACHIT'S HEAD.

TO LEAD OUR ARMY, WE NEED A WARRIOR WHO HOLDS HONOUR DEARER THAN HIS LIFE. WE THINK WE HAVE FOUND ONE TODAY.

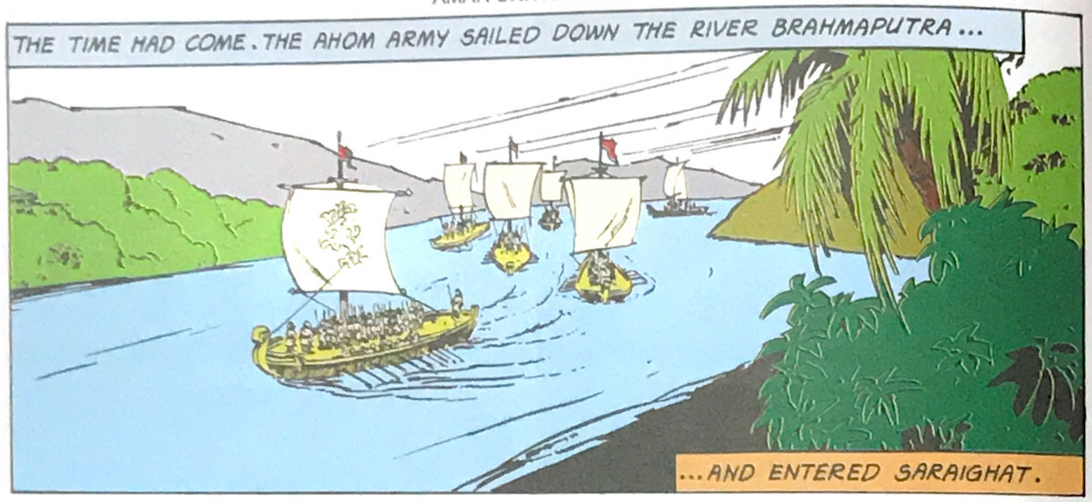
I AM HONOURED, YOUR MAJESTY.

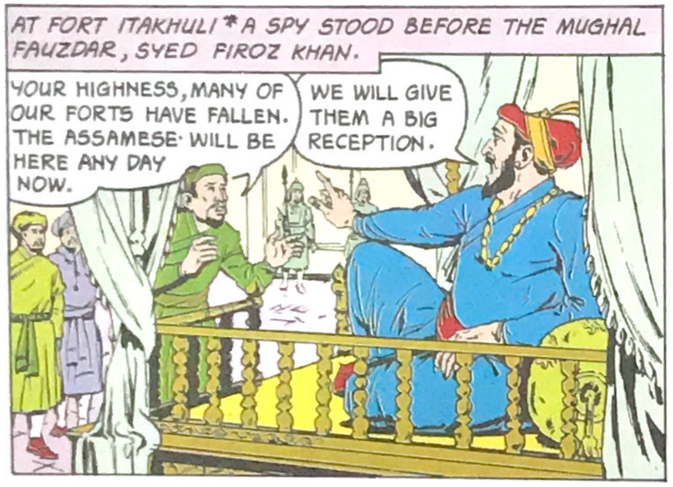
THE NEXT DAY, THE KING INVESTED LACHIT WITH THE TITLE BARPHUKAN*.

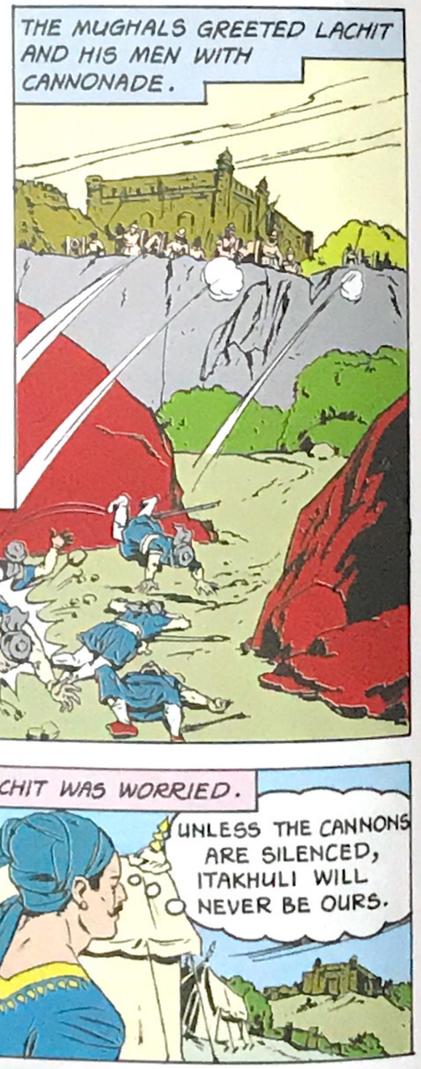
MAY YOU BRING GLORY TO OUR PEOPLE.

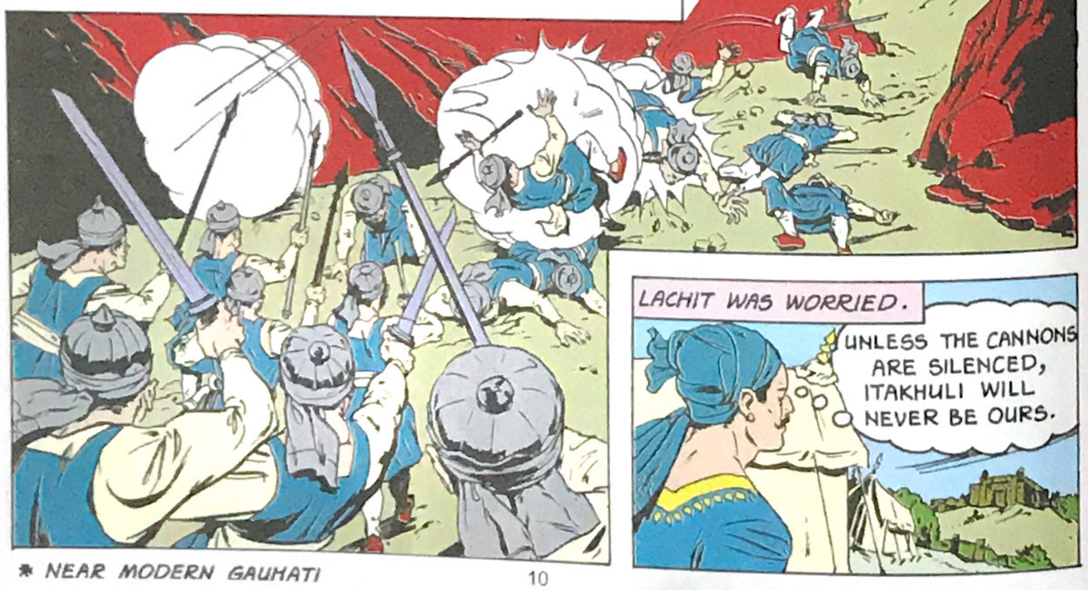
I PROMISE, YOUR MAJESTY, I'LL DRIVE OUT THE MUGHALS FROM OUR LAND.

* COMMANDER OF THE ROYAL ARMY

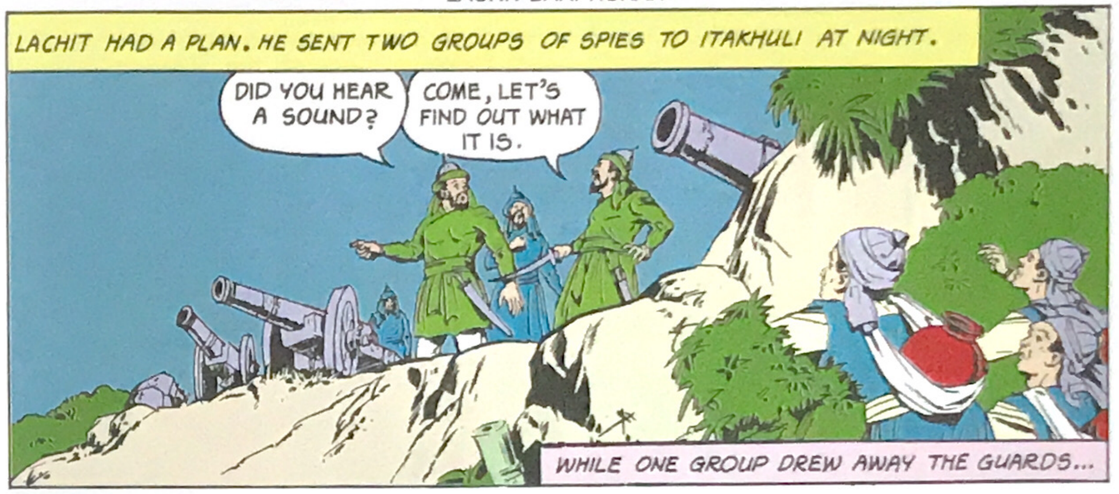


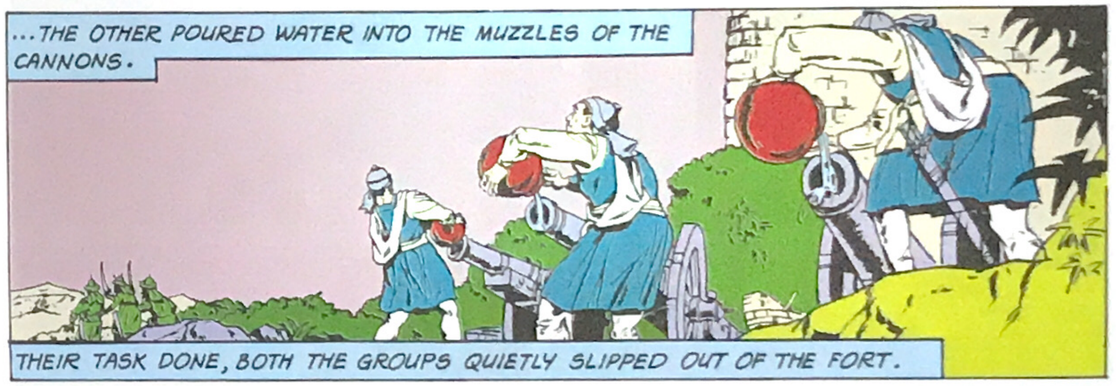


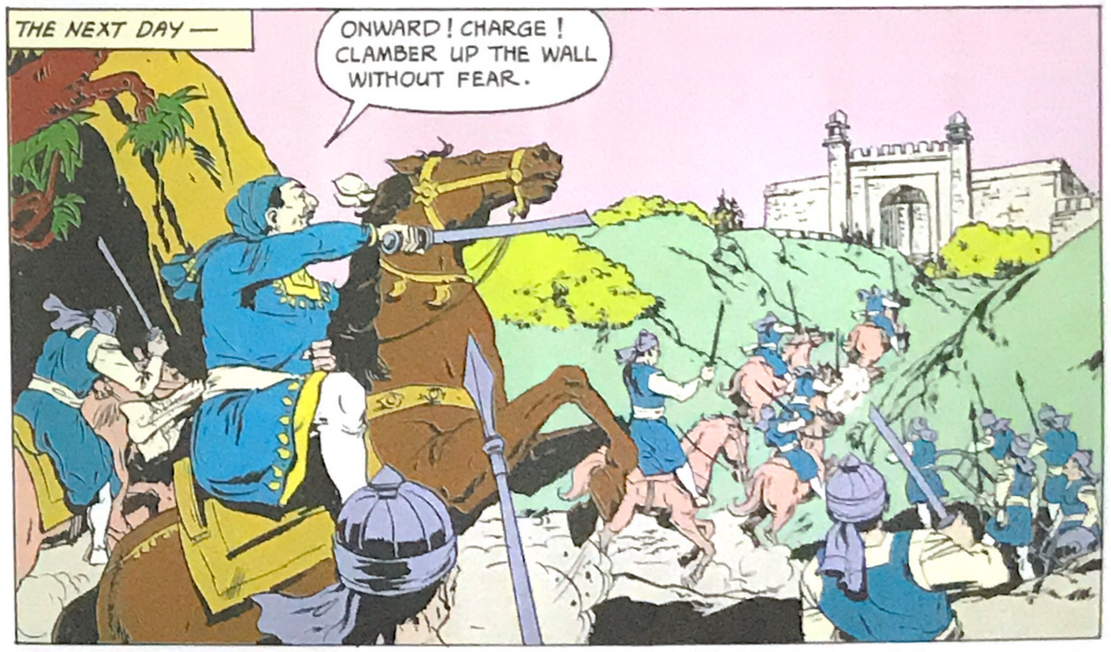




* NEAR MODERN GAUHATI







ON THE RAMPART OF THE FORT —

CHARGE THE CANNONS! FIRE!

WE CAN'T. SOMEONE HAS POURED WATER INTO THE MUZZLES OF OUR CANNONS.

THE MUGHAL RANKS BROKE UP IN CONFUSION AND COULD NOT RESIST THE PLANNED ONSLAUGHT OF THE ASSAMESE.

MEANWHILE A SECTION OF THE ASSAMESE ARMY MANAGED TO REACH THE GATE OF THE FORT ...

...AND THROW IT OPEN. LACHIT MARCHED IN.

VICTORY TO LACHIT BARPHUKAN.

WHEN THE NEWS REACHED THE CAPITAL —

MY MIND IS AT PEACE NOW.

MEANWHILE, AT ITAKHULI —

SIR, AURANGZEB HAS DESPATCHED RAM SINGH * OF AMBER WITH 63,000 MEN TO INVADE GAUHATI.

WE ARE FULLY PREPARED TO TAKE THEM ON.

LACHIT REINFORCED THE FORT, MARKED OUT STRATEGIC POSITIONS AT PASSES AND CUT DEFILES AROUND ITAKHULI.

THIS IS A VULNERABLE POSITION. HAVE A RAMPART BUILT HERE.

IT WILL TAKE SOME TIME.

DELAY CAN BE FATAL. THE RAMPART MUST BE READY WITHIN TWO DAYS.

AND LACHIT RODE AWAY.

* MANY RAJPUT NOBLES HAD THEN TAKEN SERVICE UNDER THE MUGHALS

THE OFFICER, WHO HAPPENED TO BE AN UNCLE OF LACHIT, DID NOT TAKE THE MATTER SERIOUSLY. TWO DAYS LATER —

SIR, BARPHUKAN IS COMING THIS WAY.

REALLY — I NEVER THOUGHT HE WAS THAT SERIOUS ABOUT THE RAMPART.

THE RAMPART HAD YET TO BE COMPLETED. BUT THE OFFICER WAS NOT PERTURBED.

IT SHOULD BE ALL RIGHT. AFTER ALL HE IS MY NEPHEW.

AS THE BARPHUKAN CAME INSPECTING THE PROJECTS —

WHY! THE RAMPART NOT READY YET? LAZY OFFICERS WILL RUIN OUR COUNTRY. THEY SHALL BE PUNISHED LIKE TRAITORS.

NO!

AS LACHIT'S GUARDS LED THE ERRING OFFICER AWAY —

LACHIT, YOU CAN'T PUNISH ME — YOUR UNCLE!

MY UNCLE IS NOT GREATER THAN MY COUNTRY. TAKE HIM AWAY AND HAVE HIM EXECUTED!

ALTHOUGH LACHIT STRENGTHENED FORTIFICATIONS THROUGHOUT ASSAM, RANGAMALI, A FRONTIER FORT, FELL TO THE MUGHALS.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN? GIVE ME DETAILS.

RAM SINGH EMPLOYED TRAINED HOUNDS...

...WHICH ATTACKED OUR MEN UNDER COVER OF GUN-SMOKE...

...AND CARRIED THEM OFF.

THE SURVIVORS ARE ON THEIR WAY TO ITAKHULI, SIR.

YOU MAY GO NOW AND REST.

LACHIT CALLED A MEETING OF HIS GENERALS AND EXPLAINED HIS PLANS.

WE SHOULD LURE THE ENEMY INTO SARAIGHAT AND THEN DESTROY THEM.

A GOOD IDEA. NO ONE CAN BEAT US HERE.

THE PLAN WAS PUT INTO OPERATION.

SIR, RAM SINGH HAS CAMPED AT HAZO*.

GOOD. LET'S WATCH HIS NEXT MOVE.

LATER, ONE OF RAM SINGH'S ENVOYS CALLED ON LACHIT.

SIR, RAJA RAM SINGH HAS SENT YOU A GIFT—A BAG OF POPPY-SEEDS.

*NEAR GAUHATI

POPPY-SEEDS?

YES. THE MUGHAL ARMY IS AS NUMEROUS AS THE POPPY-SEEDS IN THIS BAG. YOU'D BETTER SURRENDER GAUHATI.

POPPY-SEEDS, THOUGH NUMEROUS, HOLD NO FEAR FOR US. WE CAN POUND THEM TO A PASTE AND SO SHALL WE HANDLE YOUR ARMY.

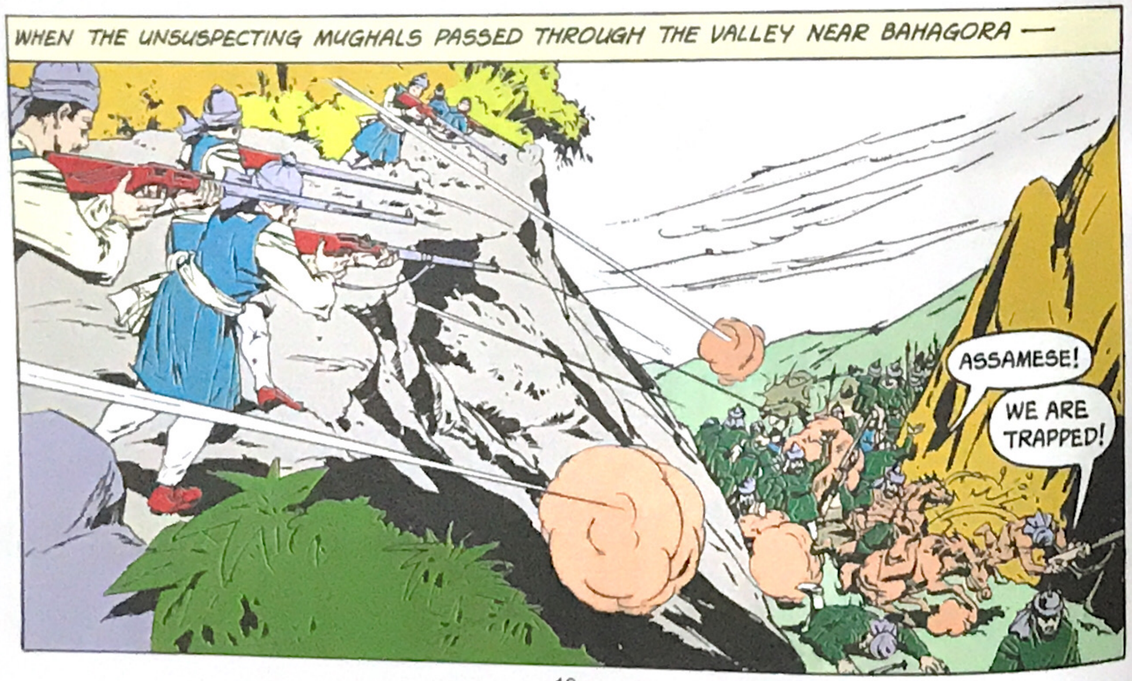
NOW YOU TAKE OUR GIFT TO YOUR MASTER AND TELL HIM THAT OUR ARMY IS AS INDISSOLUBLE AS THE SAND IN THIS TUBE.

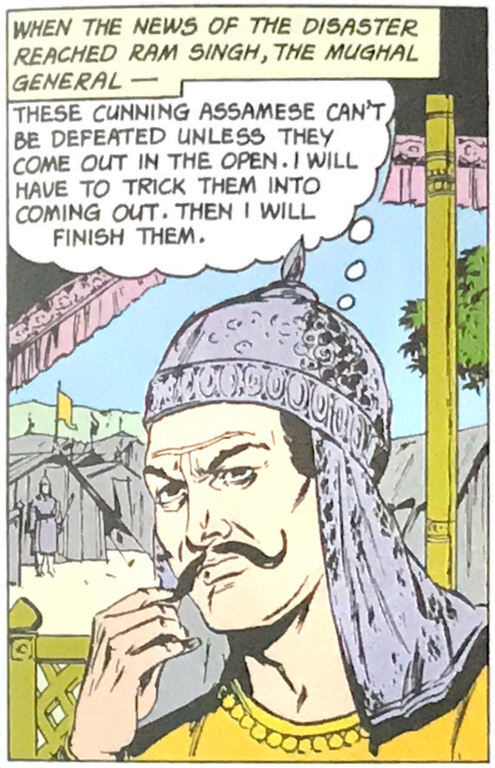
AS SOON AS THE MUGHAL ENVOY WENT AWAY, LACHIT RESUMED HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH THE COMMANDERS.

RAIN, DISEASE AND HUNGER SHOULD DESTROY OUR ENEMY IN AN UNFAMILIAR TERRAIN. ONCE THEY RUN OUT OF FOOD SUPPLY THEY WILL BE WEAK AND VULNERABLE.

TILL THEN OUR ATTACKS WILL BE SPORADIC AND AT NIGHT. WE WILL SAVE OUR MEN AND ENERGY FOR THE FINAL ASSAULT.

HIS COMMANDERS RETIRED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE POSITIONS. A LITTLE LATER —
SIR, WE'VE SPOTTED A SECTION OF THE MUGHAL ARMY HEADING TOWARDS GAUHATI. SHALL WE INTERCEPT IT?
NOT NOW. LET THEM PASS BY. LATER AT THE VALLEY...


WHEN THE UNSUSPECTING MUGHALS PASSED THROUGH THE VALLEY NEAR BAHAGORA —
ASSAMESE!
WE ARE TRAPPED!


WHEN THE NEWS OF THE DISASTER REACHED RAM SINGH, THE MUGHAL GENERAL —
THESE CUNNING ASSAMESE CAN'T BE DEFEATED UNLESS THEY COME OUT IN THE OPEN. I WILL HAVE TO TRICK THEM INTO COMING OUT. THEN I WILL FINISH THEM.

MEANWHILE AT THE CAPITAL, THE KING WAS GROWING IMPATIENT.
LACHIT HAS YET TO STRIKE HARD AT THE MUGHALS. HAS HE GOT COLD FEET?
NO, YOUR MAJESTY. HE IS ONLY WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT.

JUST THEN A MESSENGER FROM ONE OF THE COMMANDERS, CALLED ON THE KING.
YOUR MAJESTY, THIS LETTER FROM RAM SINGH, ADDRESSED TO LACHIT BARPHUKAN FELL INTO THE HANDS OF MY MASTER.

THE PRIME MINISTER READ THE LETTER ALOUD.
O BARPHUKAN, IS IT FAIR TO CONTINUE FIGHTING EVEN NOW? IT WAS ONLY ON YOUR PROMISE TO STOP FIGHTING THAT I PAID YOU A LAKH OF RUPEES.

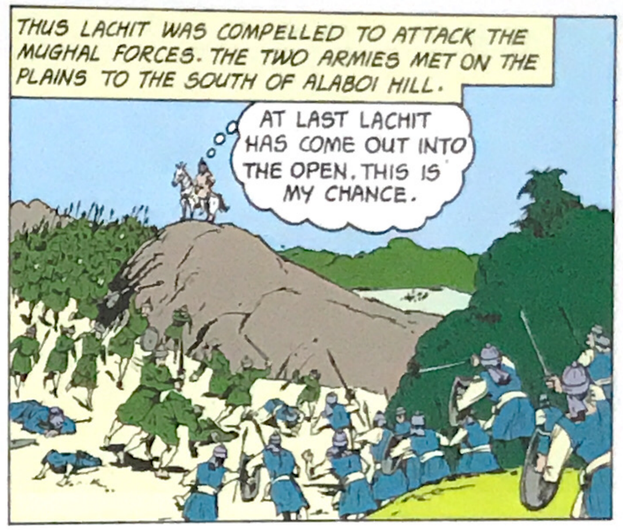
NOW I KNOW WHY THAT TRAITOR IS HOLDING HIMSELF BACK. HE HAS BEEN BOUGHT.

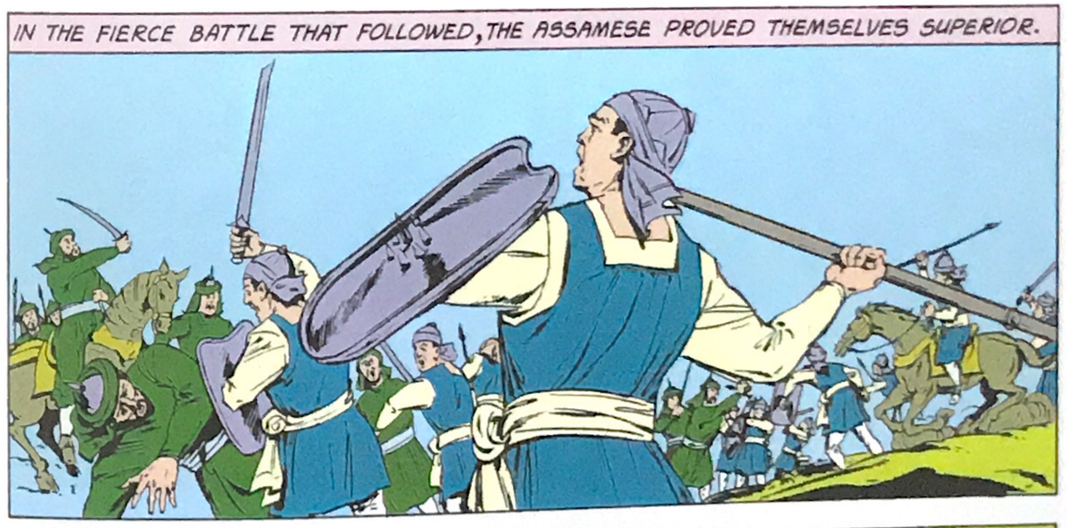
YOUR MAJESTY, IF LACHIT IS A TRAITOR THEN THERE ARE NO PATRIOTS IN OUR COUNTRY. THIS IS A RUSE OF THE MUGHALS. LET US NOT BELIEVE IT.

YES. LACHIT IS LOYAL. BUT WHY DOESN'T HE ATTACK? I'LL PROVOKE HIM TO FIGHT THE MUGHALS.

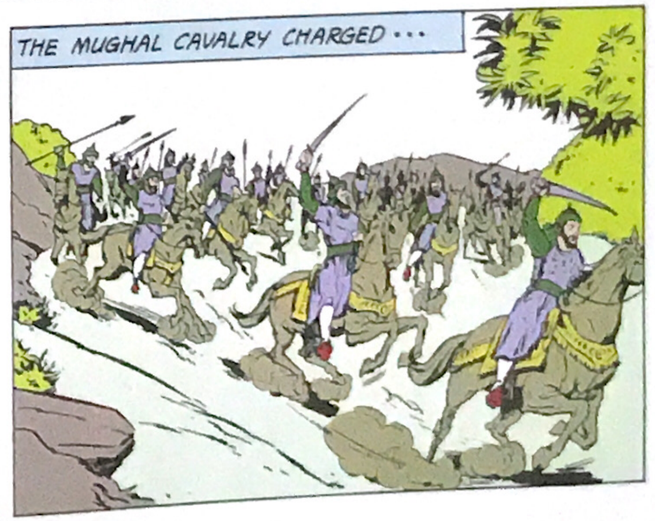
THE KING DESPATCHED A MESSENGER TO LACHIT.
YOUR HIGHNESS, THE MAHARAJA COMMANDS YOU TO ATTACK THE MUGHALS IMMEDIATELY...

...OR ELSE TO WEAR THESE WOMEN'S CLOTHES.
WHAT DOES THE KING MEAN BY THIS! WHY DOES HE WANT TO GOAD ME TO ACTION?


THUS LACHIT WAS COMPELLED TO ATTACK THE MUGHAL FORCES. THE TWO ARMIES MET ON THE PLAINS TO THE SOUTH OF ALABOI HILL.
AT LAST LACHIT HAS COME OUT INTO THE OPEN. THIS IS MY CHANCE.


IN THE FIERCE BATTLE THAT FOLLOWED, THE ASSAMESE PROVED THEMSELVES SUPERIOR.

I'D BETTER CALL MY CAVALRY TO ASSIST.


THE MUGHAL CAVALRY CHARGED...

...AND MASSACRED THE ASSAMESE.

THAT NIGHT, LACHIT WENT ROUND THE CAMP AND CONSOLED THE WOUNDED SOLDIERS.

TAKE HEART, MY BRAVE MEN. WE MAY LOSE A BATTLE BUT WE WILL WIN THE WAR.

LACHIT HAD HARDLY RAISED THE MORALE OF HIS MEN WHEN A MESSENGER ARRIVED FROM THE CAPITAL.

SIR, HIS MAJESTY IS DEAD!

NO!

I HAVE NOT YET FULFILLED THE PROMISE MADE TO THE KING. I'VE FAILED... FAILED...

LACHIT FELL SERIOUSLY ILL. THIS CAUSED JUBILATION IN THE MUGHAL CAMP.

THE NEW KING* IS INEXPERIENCED. LACHIT IS ILL. GAUHATI SHOULD BE TAKEN NOW — OR NEVER.

RAM SINGH MOVED HIS ARMY TO THE RIVER BANK...

...AND UNDER COVER OF NIGHT, THE MUGHAL FLEET BEGAN TO SAIL TOWARDS ITAKHULI.

* UDAYADITYA SINGHA SUCCEEDED CHAKRADHWAJA SINGHA.

AT ASHWAKRANTA, NEAR ITAKHULI, THE MUGHAL FLEET WAS SPOTTED.

MUGHAL SHIPS!

RUN!

WHEN LACHIT HEARD OF THE RETREAT OF HIS MEN —

TAKE ME TO THE WATER FRONT IMMEDIATELY. THE ENEMY MUST BE INTERCEPTED.

SIR, YOU ARE IN NO CONDITION TO FIGHT.

I WOULD RATHER DIE FIGHTING FOR MY COUNTRY THAN ON THE SICK-BED. CARRY ME TO THE WATER FRONT!

LACHIT WAS CARRIED TO THE GATE-HOUSE.

THE BARPHUKAN! THE BARPHUKAN!

AS SOON AS HE REACHED THE GATE-HOUSE, HE WAS ABOUT TO ORDER AN ATTACK. BUT THE ROYAL ASTROLOGER STOPPED HIM.

WAIT, BARPHUKAN! THE HOUR IS NOT AUSPICIOUS FOR ATTACK! WAIT!

O ASTROLOGER, WILL THE ENEMY WAIT FOR YOUR AUSPICIOUS HOUR? LET ME GET ON WITH THE ATTACK.

PATIENCE, BARPHUKAN.

THE MUGHAL BOATS WERE RAPIDLY ADVANCING.

O ASTROLOGER, THE MUGHALS ARE CLOSING IN ON US. YOU'VE BROUGHT ABOUT MY DISGRACE.

NOW IS THE TIME! ATTACK NOW AND VICTORY WILL BE YOURS!

SUPPORTED BY HIS PERSONAL GUARDS, LACHIT CAME DOWN THE STEPS OF THE GATE-HOUSE ...

...AND BOARDED HIS BOAT.

SIX OTHER ARMED BOATS ACCOMPANIED HIS BOAT.

THE BOAT BEGAN TO MOVE.

WHERE ARE WE HEADING? WHY ARE WE MOVING AWAY FROM THE SCENE OF ACTION?

THE HELMSMAN STEPPED FORWARD.

WE ARE SAILING UP THE RIVER TO SAVE YOUR LIFE.

MY LIFE!

HOW DARE YOU TURN MY BOAT AWAY FROM THE BATTLE SCENE!

ILL AS HE WAS, LACHIT LIFTED THE MAN . . .

...AND THREW HIM INTO THE WATER.

NOW WE WILL TAKE ON THE ENEMY!

AS HIS BOAT SPED AHEAD, LACHIT RAISED HIS VOICE, LOUD AND CLEAR,

LET THE MUGHALS CAPTURE ME ALIVE AND LET MY PEOPLE GO HOME.

HIS WORDS HAD AN ELECTRIFYING EFFECT ON HIS MEN.

THE BARPHUKAN HAS COME TO FIGHT.

WE WILL DIE FOR HIM.

WHEN THE ASSAMESE SAW THE ENEMY STEERING THEIR BARGES TOWARDS LACHIT'S BOAT—

HURRY! WE'LL JOIN THE BARPHUKAN.

DEATH TO THE MUGHALS!

IN MINUTES, LACHIT HAD TRANSFORMED DESPAIR TO COURAGE. THE MUGHALS COULD NOT STAND THE DASH AND FURY OF THE ASSAMESE ATTACK.

THE MUGHAL BOATS WERE SUNK AND MANY SOLDIERS FELL INTO THE RIVER.

RAM SINGH TURNED PALE.

A NAVAL BATTLE WITH THE ASSAMESE IS SUICIDAL. RETREAT.

AS THE MUGHALS TURNED TAIL —

VICTORY TO LACHIT BARPHUKAN!

EVEN IN THE GREAT MOMENT OF VICTORY, LACHIT WAS NOT COMPLACENT.

PURSUE THE ENEMY AT A DISTANCE AND SEE THAT THEY LEAVE OUR BORDER.

SIR, PERMIT US TO FALL UPON THEM. WE'LL BRING RICH BOOTY.

NO. LET'S NOT TARNISH THE FAIR NAME OF OUR KING AND OUR COUNTRY BY PLUNDERING FUGITIVE SOLDIERS.

GAUHATI WENT GAY AT THE DECISIVE VICTORY.

VICTORY TO LACHIT!

LACHIT DID NOT LIVE LONG AFTER THE BATTLE OF SARAIGHAT AS HIS FAMOUS NAVAL ENCOUNTER HAS COME TO BE KNOWN. HE DIED HAPPY IN THE THOUGHT THAT HE HAD DONE HIS DUTY BY HIS KING AND HIS COUNTRY.